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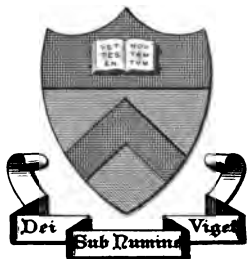


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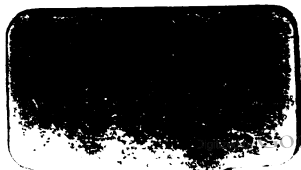
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THE STORY OF IDA





In the last ray of Sunset
And the last day of the Year

1872

**THE STORY OF IDA
EPITAPH
ON AN ETRURIAN TOMB BY
FRANCESCA ALEXANDER**



UNIVERSITY
OF
PORTLAND
ME

Portland, Maine
THOMAS B. MOSHER,
Mdcccxcix

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PREFACE



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PREFACE.

FOR now some ten or twelve years I have been asking every good writer whom I knew, to write some part of what was exactly true, in the greatest of the sciences, that of Humanity. It seemed to me time that the Poet and Romance-writer should become now the strict historian of days which, professing the openest proclamation of themselves, kept yet in secrecy all that was most beautiful, all that was most woful, in the multitude of their unshepherded souls. And, during these years of unanswered petitioning, I have become more and more convinced that the wholesomest antagonism to whatever is dangerous in the temper, or foolish in the extravagance, of modern Fiction, would be found in sometimes substituting for the artfully-combined improbability, the careful record of providentially ordered Fact.

Providentially, I mean, not in the fitting together of evil so as to produce visible

good,—but in the enforcement, though under shadows which mean but the difference between finite and infinite knowledge, of certain laws of moral retribution which enough indicate for our guidance, the Will, and for our comfort the Presence, of the Judge and Father of men.

It might be thought that the function of such domestic history was enough fulfilled by the frequency and full detail of modern biography. But lives in which the public are interested are scarcely ever worth writing. For the most part compulsorily artificial, often affectedly so,—on the whole, fortunate beyond ordinary rule,—and, so far as the men are really greater than others, unintelligible to the common reader,—the lives of statesmen, soldiers, authors, artists, or any one habitually set in the sight of many, tell us at last little more than what sort of people they dealt with, and of pens they wrote with; the personal life is inscrutably broken up,—often contemptibly, and the external aspect of it merely a husk, at the best. The lives we need to have written for us are of the people whom the world has not thought of,—far less heard of,—who are yet doing the most of its work, and of whom we may learn how it can best be done.

PREFACE

The following story of a young Florentine girl's too short life is absolutely and simply true: it was written only for memorial of her among her friends, by the one of them that loved her best, and who knew her perfectly. That it was *not* written for publication will be felt after reading a few sentences; and I have had a certain feeling of desecrating its humility of affection, ever since I asked leave to publish it.

In the close of the first lecture given on my return to my duties in Oxford, will be found all that I am minded at present to tell concerning the writer, and her friends among the Italian poor; and perhaps I, even thus, have told more than I ought, though not in the least enough to express my true regard and respect for her, or my admiration of her powers of rendering, with the severe industry of an engraver, the most pathetic instants of action and expression in the person she loves. Her drawing of Ida, as she lay asleep in the evening of the last day of the year 1872, has been very beautifully and attentively, yet not without necessary loss, reduced in the frontispiece, by Mr. W. Roffe, from its own size, three-quarters larger;—and thus, strangely, and again let me say, providentially, I can show, in the same book, examples of the purest truth, both in history, and

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picture. Of invented effects of light and shade on imaginary scenes, it seems to me we have admired too many. Here is a real passage of human life, seen in the light that Heaven sent for it.

One earnest word only I have to add here, for the reader's sake, — let it be noted with thankful reverence that this is the story of a Catholic girl written by a Protestant one, yet the two of them so united in the Truth of the Christian Faith, and in the joy of its Love, that they are absolutely unconscious of any difference in the forms or letter of their religion.

^{John}
J. RUSKIN. ✓

BRANTWOOD, *14th April*, 1883.





THE STORY OF IDA





THE STORY OF IDA.

PART I.

A WEEK ago yesterday, I looked for the last time on her who has been, for so long, at once a care and a help to me.

I feel that her life has left a great peacefulness in mine, that will be a long time before it quite fades away, like the light which remains so long after sunset on a summer evening; and while I am yet, as it were, within her influence, I have wished to write down a little of what I remember of her, that so beautiful a life and death may not be quite forgotten.

It is now nearly four years ago, that a school-teacher, who had been long a friend of mine, came to ask that I would interest myself for one of her scholars, who was about to pass a difficult examination, that she might obtain a diploma of *Maestra Comunale*. Giulia — that was the young girl's

name—was a pleasant, fresh-looking girl, with honest, bright blue eyes, and dark hair that curled lightly about her forehead. Her voice and face interested me at once; and I soon found out that her history also was an interesting one. She was one of a family of fifteen children, then all dead but three; her father was advanced in life, her mother was an invalid, and they were all very poor. There was a sad story also in the family. One of Giulia's elder brothers had been married, and lived happily for some years with his wife. She died, leaving him with four little children; and such was the violence of his grief, that his mind gave way,—not all at once, but little by little. Gradually he began to neglect his work, his language and behaviour were agitated and unlike his usual self, he wandered much about without an object,—and one day the report of a pistol was heard in his room, and that was the last! The grandparents had taken home all the poor little orphans, and it was to assist in supporting them that Giulia wished to be a teacher.

She had been studying very hard—so hard that she had finished in six months the studies which should have occupied a year! She was an energetic little body, made bold by the necessities of the children; and she

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went about to the various offices, and had all the needful papers made out, and obtained introductions to all those persons whom she thought likely to help her in her object. Of course I was too happy to do what I could — very little as it happened — and Giulia's youth, and hopefulness, and bright spirit, were like sunshine in my room. She was much there in those days, talking over her prospects, and what was to be done. One day she came with a very beautiful companion, a little girl of sixteen: "I have brought my sister; she wanted to see you," she said, by way of apology; and that was how I came to know Ida.

She was very lovely then; I do not think that any of the pictures which I afterwards took of her, were quite so pretty as she was. Let me see if I can describe her. She was a little taller than Giulia, and perhaps rather too slight for perfect beauty, but singularly graceful both in form and movement. Such a shape as the early painters used to imagine for their young saints, with more spirit than substance about it; her hair was dark, almost black, quite straight, as fine as silk, soft, heavy, and abundant; and she wore it turned back from her face, as was the fashion just then, displaying to the best advantage a clear, broad, intellectual forehead.

She had a regular oval face, rather small than large ; with soft black eyes of wonderful beauty and gentleness, shaded by perhaps the longest lashes which I ever saw—with a pretty little straight nose (which gave a peculiar prettiness to her profile), and a mouth not very small, but beautiful in form and most delicate in expression. Her teeth were very white, brilliant, and regular ; her complexion was dark, without much colour, except in her lips, which were of a deep red. When she was a little out of breath, however, or when she was animated in talking, a bright glow used to come up in her cheeks, always disappearing almost before one knew that it was there. She and I made great friends during that first visit : she liked me, as a matter of course, because Giulia liked me ; and on my part, it would have been impossible that I should not love anything so beautiful and innocent and affectionate. I did not let her go until we had arranged that I should take her likeness ; and from that time forward, as long as Ida lived, I was almost half the time employed either in drawing or painting her. It was seldom that I could keep any picture of her for more than a little while : every one used to ask me where I had found such a beautiful face.

It is pleasant to me now to look back at

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those days, before any shadow came over that peaceful and most innocent life. Those long happy mornings in my painting room, when she used to become so excited over my fairy stories and ballads, and tried to learn them all by heart to tell to Giulia; and when she, in turn, confided to me all the events and interests of her short life. One thing I soon discovered, — that she was quite as beautiful in mind as in person. If I tell all the truth of what Ida was, I am sure that it will seem to any one who did not know her as if I were inventing. She seemed, even in those early days, like one who lived nearer heaven than other people. I have never quite understood it myself; she had been brought up more in the world than is usual with Italian girls, for (as I have said) her parents were poor, and her mother sickly, and she had been obliged, even from early childhood, to work hard for her daily bread. It seemed almost impossible that no bad influence should ever have come near her; but if it ever did, it passed by without harming her, for there was nothing in her on which it could take hold. Her mind seemed to turn naturally to everything that was good and beautiful, while what was evil made no impression on her, but passed by her as if it had not been.

She lived in a dismal old house, up a great many stairs, in one of the poorest streets of the city. All this does not sound very pleasant: but what did Ida see there? Any one else would have seen, looking from the windows there, dirty old houses out of repair, crammed full of poverty, broken windows, leaky roofs, rickety stairs, rags hung out to dry from garret windows, pale, untidy, discouraged women, neglected children. Ida saw the bright sky, and the swallows that built under the eaves, and the moss and flowers that grew between the tiles on the old roofs. And from one window she could see a little far-away glimpse of the country, and from another she could look down into a garden. She saw the poor neighbours besides, but to her they were all people to be loved, and pitied, and sympathised with. Whatever there was, good, in any of them, she found it out, and ignored everything else. It was a peculiarity of my Ida, that all the people with whom she was intimately acquainted were, in some way or other, "very remarkable." She never admitted that they had any faults. One old woman whose temper was so fearful that nobody could live with her, was "a good old woman, but a little nervous. She had been an invalid for many years, and was a great sufferer,

and naturally she had her days when things worried her." An idle, dirty old fellow, who lodged in the same house, — who lived principally by getting into debt at one eating-house until the owner would trust him no longer, and then going to another, — she described as "an unfortunate gentleman in reduced circumstances, who had been educated in high life, and consequently had never learnt to do anything. Besides, he was a poet, and poets are always peculiar." A profane man, who talked atheism, she charitably said was probably insane. Poor little Ida! The time came when her eyes were opened by force; when she saw sin in its ugliness in the person of one who was very dear to her, — and then she died.

But that was some time afterwards. I am writing now of that first happy winter, when I was coming, little by little, to know what my companion was. *All* that she was, I never knew till after she was gone. Ida was a little seamstress, and she was then only beginning to earn money. Thirty centimes a day¹ was what she gained when she worked for a shop, and for this she used to sit at the sewing machine until past mid-

¹ Three English pence. The larger payment at private houses, a franc, is one hundred centimes, or tenpence.

night. Sometimes she used to sew for ladies at their houses, and then she earned a franc a day or more.

Her parents allowed her to keep all her own earnings, that she might clothe herself; but there was always something that she wanted for father, or mother, or Giulia, or the little orphans, more than anything that she wanted for herself; so that her own dress was always kept down to objects of the strictest necessity. I am sure it was not that she did not care for pretty things as much as any other girl: if any of the ladies where she worked gave her a piece of ribbon, or a scrap of coloured silk, or anything else that was bright and pretty, it was an unending amusement to make it up in some fanciful and becoming style, whether for Giulia or herself, though she always enjoyed the most working for Giulia. But generally she was engaged in saving money, a few centimes at a time, to buy a present for somebody, which was a great secret, confided to me under promise of silence. *One centime a day* she always laid by for "the poor." "It is very little," she said, "but I save it up until Sunday, and it is enough to buy a piece of bread for an old blind man, who always comes to us for his breakfast on Sunday morning."

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When the time came for Giulia to pass her examination, Ida came to my room every day, and sometimes twice a day, to tell me what progress she was making. Often she came when I was not at home, and then she would write a note with my pencil on a scrap of paper, and pin it up to the window-frame, where I should be sure to see it. I have kept some of these little notes up to this time, written in a childish round hand, telling how many "marks" Giulia had received for geography, and how many for grammar, all signed in the same way—" *La sua Ida che li vuol tanto bene!*" As long as she lived, her letters were always signed in the same way. Often I would find two or three flowers, carefully arranged by her hand, in a glass of water on my table; or, if I had left my door locked, they would be made into a fanciful bunch, and tied with a bit of blue ribbon on the door-handle. Giulia passed her examination triumphantly, as she deserved to do; and soon after obtained a place as teacher in one of the free schools. I remember that there was a great excitement at that time with regard to a new dress, which Giulia was to wear when she took charge of her class. Ida had been saving money for a great while to buy that dress—it was a grey alpaca—and it was

all made, and trimmed, and ready to put on, before Giulia knew anything about it. First I saw the dress unmade, and then made; and then Giulia hurried over to show it to me, supposing that I should be as much surprised as she was.

Meanwhile the winter had passed into spring, and spring was wearing fast into summer, and my pretty Ida was beginning to look rather poorly. She grew very thin, and had but little appetite; I thought also that she looked rather sad—but if I asked her what was the matter, she always said that she was tired, and felt the warm weather. I forgot to say that her mother let rooms to lodgers; by the way, the vagabond poet of whom I have spoken was a lodger of hers. A man who had lodged with them for some time had just then left them; and a military officer had taken his room. I remember still the day when Ida first spoke to me of this man, and seemed pleased that her mother had found a new lodger instead of the old one. Oh, if I could only have warned her against him then!

But, as I have said, Ida seemed to be fading, and I felt pretty anxious about her. We were going up to the mountains about that time, and when we parted she said, "Perhaps you will not find me when you

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come back; I feel as if I should not live very long." But she could give me no reason for this presentiment, and I attached no great importance to it, thinking only that she was weak and nervous. After we had been for a few weeks at S. Marcello, I received a letter from her, almost unintelligible, written evidently in great distress of mind, in which she entreated me, if possible, to come to Florence that she might speak to me, as she was in much trouble. She added that she wished she had confided in me sooner; and begged me in no case to let any one know that I had received a letter from her, but to direct my answer to the post-office, and not to the house. I was greatly alarmed, and wrote to her without losing a minute, telling her that it was impossible that I could go to Florence (as the journey was much longer than I had supposed), and begging her to write again immediately, and tell me what was really the matter. After two or three days of almost unbearable suspense, her answer came,—long enough, and plain enough, this time. I wish now that I had kept her letter, that I might tell this part of her sad story in her own words. In my own, it is hard for me to tell it without speaking more harshly than I would, of one who has at least this

claim on my forbearance — that Ida loved him!

The military officer of whom I have spoken, who had then been for three or four months in the house, had fallen in love with Ida, in his fashion: that is, she was not his first love, probably not his last, but she pleased him. He was a man of not far from forty years old, good-looking in a certain way, broad-shouldered, tall, fresh-coloured; and very much of a gentleman in his manners. He was a man of talent besides, and he had travelled much in his military life, and could tell interesting stories of strange places and people. He had also read a great deal, and could talk of various authors, and quote poetry on all occasions. As a soldier and an Italian, he had, I believe, done himself honour.

I wish I could think that there was some foundation of truth in the passionate attachment which he professed for Ida. I suppose he was fond of her, somewhat, for I do not see what reason he could have had for pretending it. He said himself, afterwards, by way of excuse, that he was "blinded by passion": so let it be. Ida was then just seventeen, growing prettier every day, a delicate, spiritual little creature, looking as if the wind might blow her away; and this

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military hero, with the broad shoulders and the fair hair, threw himself at her feet, so to say; courted her passionately, desperately; and Ida gave him her heart unreservedly, and trusted him as she trusted her father and mother. I sometimes fancy that this man made love to Ida at first partly to amuse himself, to see if he could not put something of this world into the heart of this gentle little saint, who lived always, as it were, half in heaven. But if so, he was disappointed. This love once admitted into her heart became, like all her other feelings, something sacred and noble; so that, even at this day, it seems to me in a certain way to ennoble the object of it, unworthy as he was; and I cannot say a word that might bring discredit on his name.

He wished to marry her immediately; and her father and mother, simple, pious, kind-hearted people, who would have given their lives for the happiness of their children, consented willingly. They knew that he was poor and an orphan, but they were not ambitious for their pretty daughter; and they promised to take him home, and keep him as a son of their own. But now came the difficulty. L———¹ was an officer in

¹ L is not the initial of the lover's real name, nor of that by which Ida called him, which is used by Francesca in her manuscript.

the army, and by the present law in Italy an officer, until he reaches some particular rank — I think that of colonel, — is not permitted to marry, unless the woman of his choice has a certain amount of dowry. L—— had about two years and a half left to serve in the army, before he would be entitled to a pension. Now, Ida was so very young that there seemed nothing very dreadful in the idea of waiting, but her lover was a great deal too ardent for that. His proposal was — and he would hear of nothing else — that they should be married immediately by a *religious marriage*, leaving the *civil marriage* — the only one now legal — until another time, when his career in the army should be finished. The poor child knew nothing of civil and religious marriages, but she was a little frightened at the idea that her marriage would be a secret from the whole world; and altogether she was far from happy, — he told her so many things that she was never to tell any one, and such fearful ruin was to overtake them both if ever their union was discovered. Meanwhile he was very tender and grateful and reverential, not only to her but to all the family. Now at last — so he used to say — “he knew what it was to have a home and a mother! What a mercy that he, who had

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suffered so much in his wandering life, who had been so lonely and friendless, should have anchored at last in that peaceful Christian home?" That was the way he used to talk.

Meanwhile Giulia, the sensible, clear-sighted Giulia, whose heart was all bound up in her little sister, felt an unspeakable antipathy to L——. On the same day when Ida's second letter arrived at S. Marcello, explaining to me her circumstances, one came also from Giulia, giving *her* version of the story, no way differing from Ida's in the facts, but even more sad and frightened. "I cannot tell you, dear Signora Francesca," she wrote, "in what a state of continual agitation I pass my time at present, and how unhappy I am about our Ida. God grant that all may go well! Mother has gone to the priest to-day to see what they can do." I knew afterwards that Giulia, finding all persuasions fail with her sister (and indeed she had nothing then to bring up against L——, except her instinctive dread and dislike of him), entreated her mother, even with tears, to prevent the marriage by any means whatever. But the good Signora Martina (who was just as pretty, and gentle, and soft-hearted as Ida herself) could not bear the pale, wasting

face of her younger daughter, and her little hands that were growing so thin, and her sad voice; and she thought that it all came of her love for the captain, and that, if she consented to the secret marriage, Ida would grow bright and happy again.

I, at that time, knew almost nothing about such things, and could not therefore advise very strongly on one side or the other. But it pleased the Lord that the worst should not happen to our Ida. L—— was called away from Florence at a few hours' notice, to join his regiment, on *the very day before the one fixed for the marriage*. The government was just then making its preparations for the taking of Rome. What she suffered from this separation is not to be told, yet I feel that it was a providence to save her from far greater evil. When we came back to Florence in September I found Ida quite changed in appearance, but patient and resigned as she always was—willing, as she said, to leave all in the Lord's hand. "Her L—— was so good!" she used to tell me: "he had been so kind to his own family!" in particular to his brother's widow, who had been left in destitution with two little children, and to whom he was continually sending money, though he

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had so little to send. He did not, however, wish to have anything said about this woman, as he feared that Ida's parents might not so willingly consent to the marriage, if they knew that he was so burdened. I—— always had a great many things that he did not wish anything said about. Giulia, however, had her suspicions, and I had mine, about this brother's widow. We both spoke about them—Giulia, I rather think, pretty freely—to Ida. She had resolution enough, when right and wrong were concerned; and without saying anything to Giulia she went to the post-office, and inquired of the people employed there, if her lover were really in the habit of sending money to Naples, where his sister-in-law lived, and to whom. A record is always kept at the post-office of all the money that comes and goes, so that it was easy to ascertain the truth. And she found that he frequently sent money to a woman in Naples, bearing the same family name as himself. So she and I and Giulia were all quite satisfied. There was a depth of wickedness that we could not imagine, and that even now I find it hard fully to believe, with all the proofs before me!

And now the Italian troops were preparing to march upon Rome, and we were all fear-

ing a great battle; which really never came. We were all preparing lint and bandages, thinking that they might be wanted, as on former occasions; and my mother gave out work of this sort to all whom she could find to do it. Ida, I remember, refused to be paid for any work of this sort which she did for the army, saying, "Perhaps it may go for L——," — and while she sat, very pale and quiet, over her lint-making in my room, I drew that picture of her which I called "*La Fidanzata del Capitano*," which I think more like her than any of my other pictures, though not half so pretty as she was, for all that.

And now I am coming to the darkest part of my Ida's history — a time when she suffered much, and which I do not like very well to think about. I said before that I did not know much then about civil marriage. The law had not been in operation more than a little while. But at the same time, I did not feel quite easy about this marriage which was to be kept a secret. It seemed to me that my poor Ida was passing into a perfect network of secrets and mystery. I knew that the captain intended to marry her when he should come back from Rome — and that would probably be very soon. So I consulted a friend, who knew

more about such things than I did, and she told me just what this religious marriage was—that is, as far as its consequences for this world were concerned, no marriage at all. Then I thought that I ought to tell Ida what she was doing,—which was not very easy, for I knew how her heart was bound up in L——.

One day, up there in my room, we talked it all over, and I told her, as gently as I could, all that had been told to me. She was much shocked and distressed, and shed a great many tears, but quietly. What affected her most was the idea that such a marriage might bring misery on her children, if she should ever have any. “It must be fearful,” she said, “for a woman to feel remorse in the presence of her children,—to see them in misery and to think ‘*I brought this trouble upon them!*’” Then she added, “People have all been very cruel not to have told me these things before! I knew that I could not have borne such a life.” Still, she was not willing at that time to make me a definite promise that she would not do it. I was anxious that she should do so, as we were about going away for a month’s visit to Padova and Bassano. During that month I knew that L—— was expected in Florence, and I feared his influ-

ence upon her. Ida was so very gentle, and usually so submissive to those about her, that I did not then comprehend the true strength and determination of her character.

A day or two afterwards she came to say goodbye before I went. "I had a sad night," she said, "after our talk the other day; I could not sleep for thinking of L——. But you must not think hardly of him: he has always meant well, but he is a passionate, impulsive man, and does not know always how to stop and think of the consequences. You must not be anxious about me while you are away. I cannot make you any promise just now, but I have quite resolved never to marry until we can be married legally, and I hope that I can promise you this when you come back." During the month that we were away I heard no more of Ida, and those to whom I told her story shook their heads, and prophesied that the captain would have it all his own way when he should come to Florence. I did not think so, but I kept silence, for I had no reason for my faith, excepting a certain look in Ida's beautiful eyes when she said those words to me,—a look humble and yet steadfast, as of one strong in another's strength,—a look that

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I would give a good deal if I could put in some of my pictures of saints.

When at last I did come back, Ida came to my room as soon as she heard that I was there. She looked pale and frightened and ill, and began to talk almost before she was in the room, as if she had something that she was in a great hurry to say. "I have come to make you that promise, Signora Francesca, which I could not make you before you went away. I promise you that I will never marry L——, nor any one else, excepting by a lawful marriage." "I thought," I said, "that you had come to tell me this, and I am very thankful to hear it." "And I have been in such a hurry," she said, "for you to come home, that I might say this to you. I have been afraid always that my courage would not hold out." I then asked her to tell me exactly how it had all gone. She said that L—— had come back from Rome about a week before, fully prepared for the marriage. She had not told him of her change of resolution before his return — she could not make up her mind to write it to him: but as soon as he came, and she had a chance to speak to him alone, she told him all that I had told her, saying that she had consented at first to the religious marriage in ignorance, but

that she was now convinced that it would be wrong. At first he seems to have thought, as every one else thought, that he could make Ida do what he pleased; then, when he found that she stood firm against all his persuasions, he went into a passion, and terrified the poor girl beyond measure with his violence, still without shaking her resolution. And then he left her in anger, and went away from Florence without seeing her again, and she had not heard from him since. She had been ill — had been three days confined to her bed — and she looked half dead; and I noticed then, for the first time, that peculiar tone in her voice which it never afterwards lost.

Still, she said that she was not sorry for what she had done, let it end as it might. It was all in God's hands now, and as He had ordered it, so it would be. She had been very unhappy, but she felt less so now that I had come; and it would certainly have been a great deal worse if she had married L—— first, and found out all these things afterwards. I tried to comfort her, though I myself felt a good deal shocked and surprised at the turn which things had taken. I told her that if L—— really cared for her he would write to her again, and would be willing to wait for the two

years and a half. "I cannot feel," she said, "as if it could ever come right now, but we shall see."

Two days afterwards she really did receive a very penitent and affectionate letter from L——, which she brought to me; but she was not very much cheered by it. She still loved L——, but she no longer trusted him, though she always tried to excuse his conduct in speaking of him; but I do not know if there be anything in the world more unhappy than love without trust. He had been ordered to Sicily, to fight the brigands, and they were not likely to meet again for many months. I did not quite know what to make of this letter: it was very fervent in its expressions of affection, full of desperate sorrow for the long and inevitable separation. But there was not a word in it about marriage. I noticed the same thing in his succeeding letters, which for a long time she always brought for me to read. Some of them were very beautiful letters, full of interesting descriptions, and of much tender and lofty sentiment. He would speak of her as "the lamp that gave light to his life"; he sent many affectionate and reverential messages to "the dear mother whom he loved as his own" (and only to think of the trouble that he brought on this *dear*

mother!), but he never spoke of their marriage, or of their future home. Besides, his letters were, to my mind, just a little too virtuous, too full of sensitive shrinking from other people's sins, pathetic lamentations about the wickedness of the Sicilians, and paternal advice to Ida, who was so much better than he was! That style may do very well for a clergyman, but I rather distrust it in a military man. However, I supposed that all would end well, and that there was probably some reason, more than I knew, for whatever seemed strange in L——'s conduct. I tried to keep up Ida's courage—more, I think now, than I should have done—but she was gradually coming to talk less about L——; less, indeed, about anything. She liked better than anything else to sit and read when she came to my room. She took her choice always of my books, generally choosing poetry—religious poetry rather than anything else; and she used to read aloud to me with great simplicity of manner (for she had never been taught declamation), but with a certain tone in her voice which invariably put me into tears, so that I sometimes had to stop her reading, as it made me unable to go on with my work. The room which had been occupied by L—— when he lived in Florence

had now been taken by a married couple; the husband was an officer, and his wife married to him only by a religious marriage. This poor woman was very unhappy, and she confided her troubles to Ida, who often spoke to me about her. Once she said to me that I had done a great deal for her in many ways (this was only a fancy of hers, arising out of her strong affection for me), but never so much as when I had prevented the religious marriage; that she should have died if she had found herself in the condition of her poor neighbour. It was a comfort to me that she said so, as I had begun to feel almost sorry for the part which I had taken, seeing how she was pining, and to wish that I had not interfered about this marriage, which, after all, however dangerous, would not have been regarded by the Church as sinful. But I *knew* now that I did right in that matter. She gradually stopped bringing L——'s letters for me to read; and when I spoke of him, she used to tell me that the feeling was strong in her mind that she should never be L——'s wife, and that she tried not to think too much about it, nor to set her heart upon it, but to keep herself "ready for the Lord's will, whatever it might be."

One day she found a New Testament in my

*room,*¹ the first which she had ever seen; and after that she never cared so much for any other book, but would sit and read chapter after chapter with never-failing delight, only interrupting herself now and then to say, "How beautiful!" When Giulia had a holiday she used to come also, and she was as much pleased with the Testament as her sister. The two girls would sit by me while I painted, by the hour together, and one would read till her voice was tired, and then hand the book to her sister; and so they would go on taking turns until they would read often more than twenty chapters at once. When I found they did not grow tired of it, I gave them a Testament to keep for themselves, and such was their excitement that they sat up reading it nearly all the first night after they had it.

Meanwhile, poor Ida had continued to grow thin and pale, and did not eat enough for a sparrow. We took her to our good English doctor, but he was not able to do much for her, and indeed could not tell what was the matter with her. He thought that the room where she slept was unhealthy, as there was no window in it. The family, being poor, were obliged to let all their good

¹ Italics mine.— J. R.

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rooms, and to occupy all the dark and inconvenient ones themselves; so that Ida and Giulia and their little niece Luisa slept all together in what was really nothing more than a dark closet. He thought also that she had injured herself by drawing water for her mother, who took in washing. So Giulia, out of her small earnings, hired a woman to come every day and draw the water, and the poet received notice to leave his room at the beginning of the next month. This was the less loss, as he had not paid his rent for some time, and the family were also frequently obliged to give him his dinner, because, as Ida told me, "they could not eat their own meal in comfort while there was a man in the house with nothing to eat." He said, when told that he must leave, as Ida was ill and needed the room, that, *being for that reason*, he could not refuse; and when the time came he walked away majestically, with a bundle of manuscript and a pair of old shoes, which appeared to constitute his whole property. And now, as I shall never say anything more about the poet, I will add to his credit, that he afterwards came back, to everybody's astonishment, and paid up all his debts, having obtained employment, I believe, to write for a republican newspaper.

So that year finished and another came; and Ida had a little cough, but no one thought much of it. We went away again into the country for two months, and during that time the sisters wrote to me twice, and Ida's letters were happy and affectionate, and she seemed to enjoy her new room (which was the very one that looked away into the country), and she spoke again of L——, as I thought, more hopefully.

We went back to Florence about the first of September, and I found Ida still ailing, but with nothing particular the matter with her. She was studying for an examination so that she might also be a teacher, and she said that L—— wished it. He had now (I believe) only a year and a little more left to serve in the army, and during that time he expected to come to Florence for a visit. I told her that the time would pass soon, and that the long waiting was nearly over, and she and L—— would be happy now before very long. To this she only answered — "*As God has destined it, so will it be.*" I thought sometimes that she had become indifferent to her lover, or else that she was frightened about her own health, and did not expect to recover. I did not like to have her study so much, as I was sure it hurt her; but about that it was of no use

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for me to talk. L——'s will was law to her, if only it did not interfere with her own conscience.

Her cough had increased, and she could not read to me very often. Then one night she was taken ill with insupportable pains in her shoulders, which lasted for several hours, and then left her as weak as a baby. That was the beginning of the end.

Poor Giulia suffered more, I think, than her sister. She was now herself engaged to be married, and should naturally have been saving a little money for her wedding outfit. But of this she thought nothing; there was no room in her heart now for anything but Ida. All that she could save she spent daily in an attempt, nearly vain, to buy something that her sister could eat, and then she would come to my room, crying bitterly, to tell me of her failures and of Ida's constantly progressing illness. But Ida continued to come to my room all that winter and spring, and the change in her for the worse was so *very* gradual that I was not much frightened about her. She seemed cheerful and interested in everything about her, as indeed she always had been. She was more beautiful than ever, and might have turned the heads of half the men in Florence if she had been so disposed, for as a general rule all those

who saw her fell more or less in love with her. But Ida, kind and friendly in her manners with all those who treated her respectfully and kept their distance, would shrink into herself, and become quite unapproachable at the least shadow of a compliment; so that I do not think, after all, that any of her numerous admirers ever went so far as to make themselves very unhappy about her, seeing from the first that she was out of their reach.

All the poor people used to call her "Signora," now that she was grown up, though her condition was no higher than their own. I am sure that it was not that she was better dressed than themselves (excepting in the one matter of neatness), still less that she gave herself any airs of superiority, for she was humble almost to a fault, willing to act as servant to the lowest amongst them if she could be of any use,¹ ready on all occasions to take the lowest place. But there was a certain peculiar refinement and unconscious loftiness about her which we all felt, and which raised her above other people.

And the summer came again, and this time we had to go away earlier than in other years because we had a friend very ill in

¹ Italics all mine. — J. R.

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Venice, who wished us to come to him. Ida came to take leave of me as I was preparing to leave my painting room, and she seemed more sorry to have me go than she had ever been before. She loved dearly that room where we had first met, and where we had spent so many hours together, some sad and some happy: it had always been one of her principal cares to put it in order when she came to me, and to bring flowers for it, and to make it look as pleasant and pretty as she could. And on that day she walked around it slowly, stopping often that she might look long on each one of the objects grown, in the course of time, to be like familiar friends. And then she came up to me and kissed me, and I saw that her eyes were overflowing with tears. I wonder if the thought was in her mind that she should never see the place again.

PART II.¹

WHAT I am going to write now was not known to me until very lately — at least, the greater part of it was not. Before I left Florence, however, I had begun to feel pretty sure that Ida's mysterious illness came of her grief for L——. One day I said to her, "Ida, tell me if I have guessed rightly: you have suffered more about L—— than you have been willing to tell." And she answered, "If I have, I have never troubled any one else about it."

A few days after I left her, L—— made his long promised visit to Florence. He seemed troubled at the change in Ida, and met her at first very kindly. He saw her, however, only once, and then left her, saying that he would come again the next day. The next day, however, instead of L—— himself, came a letter from him saying that he had been obliged to leave Florence in haste, and that he had not felt able to support the sorrow of taking leave of Ida. They never met again.

Ida was much grieved at his leaving her so abruptly. Giulia was more than grieved,

¹ Thus divided by the writer — the evening from the morning. They are but one day. — J. R.

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—she was suspicious of something worse than appeared. Now, there lived in Florence a cousin of L——'s, a married lady, with whom the two girls were hardly acquainted. To her Giulia went in her trouble, and told her all about Ida, and how strangely L—— had behaved towards her; and she asked her to tell her the truth, if she knew it, whether he really intended to marry her when he should leave the army. The lady appeared troubled, and answered her very sadly, "You must know that L—— is in a very difficult position; he has grave duties to perform." "What duties?" asked Giulia, who could not imagine that any duty could be greater than his duty to her sister. And the lady answered, yet more sadly than before, that he was the father of two children. The horror of the innocent open-hearted Giulia is more easily imagined than described. Trembling, she asked of the children's mother, and learned that she was another victim, even more unfortunate than Ida. L—— had married her by a *religious* marriage,¹ promising to marry her legally when he should leave the army. She was a Neapolitan, the very same widowed sister-

¹ I do not understand how the Catholic priesthood permits itself to be made an instrument of this wickedness.— J. R.

in-law to whom he had been in the habit of sending money. So all was explained.

Her first impulse was to tell everything to her sister; but Ida was very weak just then, and she almost feared that such a shock would be fatal to her. The same consideration prevented her telling either of her parents, as she feared that they would be unable to contain their indignation. Then she thought that perhaps Ida was going to die, and in that case perhaps it would be better that she should never know on what a worthless object she had set her heart. But she did what was most natural to such an open, straightforward girl as Giulia. She wrote to L—— himself, and let him know that she had discovered all. She also told him that Ida was growing always worse, and that she should not tell her anything about it while she was so ill; and she entreated him not to let her suspect anything until she should have recovered.

Now, I cannot imagine what was the captain's motive for what he did — whether he did not believe Giulia's promise of silence, or whether he was tired of Ida and wished to rid himself of her. However it may have been, he did what was sufficiently cruel: he wrote Ida a letter, and told her the whole. Ida never showed that letter to any one, so

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I only know what she told Giulia, who told me. He told her that he was not legally bound to his Neapolitan wife, and that he meant to separate from her and to marry Ida, but that it might be some little time before he could complete the necessary arrangements.

From the day that this letter arrived all hope was over for Ida, so far as this world was concerned. She broke a blood-vessel the same day, and was never the same again. She wrote immediately to L——, without reproach or resentment, and told him that there was only one thing for him to do: to marry the poor woman whom he had deceived, and to give a name to his children.

Meanwhile she told no one, not even her sister. *In the utter unselfishness of her affection for L——, she seems almost to have forgotten her own trouble, and to have thought only of saving him from all appearance of blame.*¹ And so, for a long time, those two young girls lived on together, each one bearing her own burden in silence. Ida's hold on this world had never been very strong, and it had quite given way now. Her life was going fast away from her.

¹ Italics mine. — J. R.

Meanwhile, L—— seems to have felt his old affection for her, such as it was, revive, at the idea of losing her altogether; and he continued to write her passionate and imploring letters. Her answers were very gentle and patient, written so as to spare his feelings as much as possible, but they were very decided. She could never belong to him now—he must not think of that any more—but she entreated him to make what reparation he could to the poor Neapolitan, and to give *her* the happiness, before they parted, of knowing that he had done right.

And poor Giulia was at her wits' end, seeing her sister grow so rapidly worse, and not knowing the reason. She wrote to me at Venice, begging that I would use my influence to have her sister admitted to the Marine Hospital at Viareggio, that she might have a month's sea bathing, which some thought would be good for her. As soon as Ida heard that I was interesting myself about this, she also wrote me a few lines—the last which I ever received from her. She thanked me most affectionately, but did not wish me to do anything more about it, or to spend any money: if it was the Lord's will that she should recover, then she *should* recover. And then, for the last time, came

the old signature, in a very tremulous hand now—"La sua Ida, che li vuol tanto bene."

However, I still worked to have her admitted, and she *was* admitted. Poor girl! I did not understand then, as I do now, the meaning of her letter. I thought that she wished only to save me trouble; but I know now that she wrote me because she felt that her malady was such a one as no doctors can cure. It was about that time that Giulia discovered, by some means, that her sister knew the secret which she had been keeping from her so carefully. I think they were both a little happier, or at least a little less miserable, when they were able to speak freely to each other of what was weighing so heavily on both their minds. About that time also L—— left the army, having obtained his dismissal a little sooner than was expected. So Ida went to the Marine Hospital for a month, and won the hearts of the sisters of charity by her beauty, her patience, and her self-forgetfulness. She always waited on herself, being careful to give no one trouble; and when the doctor ordered her to use some particular herb which grew wild at Viareggio, *she went out every morning to search for it, gathered, and prepared it herself.* She was very kind and attentive also to the poor sick children, who,

as usual, made up nearly all the inmates of the hospital.

I am afraid that the letters which I wrote her at this time must have given her much pain; for I thought that she would recover, and marry L——, who was now, as I supposed, free; and I used to write to her about it, meaning to encourage her. She never answered my letters, but she sent one of them to Giulia, and wrote to her—"The Signora Francesca deceives herself always; it is better so."

L——, finding that his professions of love would not soften Ida, next tried to work on her compassion. He wrote to her that there was great delay about paying his pension, and that his children were starving!

She sent him twenty francs for his children in a letter: she did not have the money with her, and she was obliged to write to her sister Giulia to lend it to her, saying that she could not bear the thought that L——'s children should suffer. After she went back to Florence she wished to pay this money, but Giulia would never take it from her; which I suppose was one reason why she left Giulia what she did at the time of her death, rather more than four months afterwards.

Having gone back to Florence much worse

than she had left it, she finally obtained the much-wished-for promise from L——, who agreed to marry his wife legally, and to make what reparation he could to his unfortunate children. Up to this time Ida had not been willing to follow the urgent advice of Giulia, and break off all communication with L——. As I did not know these facts until after her death, of course it is not possible for me to say what her reasons were; but I imagine, from what I know of Ida's character and of all her conduct in this matter, that it was her wish that this love which had cost her her life should not be altogether wasted, and that it was a comfort to her, in resigning all her own hopes of happiness, to think that she might save L—— from sin, and his family from misery.

Giulia had wished her to let me know all these particulars, saying, "The Signora Francesca would tell us what we ought to do." To which Ida replied, "*I know what I ought to do, and I will do it*"; the Signora loves me, and would be unhappy if she knew of my troubles." But now she agreed to her sister's wish, and wrote a kind letter taking leave of L——, and asking him not to answer it, nor to write to her again. She

¹ Italics Francesca's, and mine also. — J. R.

told him, that he must not think that she had any hard feeling against him because she made this request, but she thought that it would be more for the happiness of both of them, that they should cease all communication with each other.

The effort of writing this letter was so great, that at first it nearly killed her, and she became suddenly so much worse, that Giulia wished it had never been written. However, after a few days, that singular peacefulness began to come over her, which afterwards remained until she died; and she told Giulia that she felt more tranquil than for a great while before, and that if L—— should write her another letter she would not even look at it, but would give it to her sister to read and answer, that she might keep all these past troubles out of her mind.

I have done now with all the worldly part of my Ida's story: what remains will be only the account of her most wonderful and glorious passage into the other world, and of the singular and almost visible help which it pleased the Lord to give her in her long illness. So, before going any farther, I will just tell what little more I know about L——. He never wrote to her again, but he continued to send occasionally to the house for news of her, almost until the time

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of her death. I have never been able to discover whether he ever kept his promise and married his wife legally, but I hope that he did so.¹ She appears from what I have heard of her, to have been by no means a very amiable character; but then there are few tempers so sweet as not to be soured by such trouble as hers.

So October came, and once again I found myself in Florence; where almost my first visit was to Ida's room. My first thought on seeing her was that she looked better than when I had left her. She sat in an easy chair by the open window,—that window that looked away over the roofs into the open country; and she had her sewing as usual, for she always worked until she became so feeble as to make it actually impossible. I remember her, and everything about her, as if the scene were still before me. She was dressed in a sort of gray loose gown put on over her white night-dress, which gave her something of a monastic look, and her chair was covered with a chintz of a flowered pattern; her work-basket stood in a chair at her knee, and by her side was a little old table, with a few books on it, much worn. She was very white certainly, but it was a clear luminous

¹ He did.—J. R.

white that was extremely beautiful, and her lips still retained their bloom, which indeed they never lost. Her soft hair was partly dishevelled, for she had just been lying down; but it was such hair as never could look rough, and as it fell loosely about her face and neck, it so concealed their wasting that she appeared almost like one in health. Her eyes were larger and brighter than ever—all full of light, it seemed to me—and her face had lost that worn, patient look, which it had borne so long, and appeared all illuminated with happiness.

But if the first sight of her gave me hope, as soon as she began to speak the hope was gone. Her voice had grown very feeble, and nearly every sentence ended in a cough, so violent that it seemed as if it would carry her away in a minute. She was quite overcome with joy and thankfulness at seeing me again, and it was difficult to keep her from talking more than was prudent. "Oh, Signora Francesca, how I have wanted you to come!" she kept saying, and her little feverish half-transparent hands closed very tightly about mine, and her beautiful eyes looked into my face as if they could never see enough of me. Meanwhile Giulia sat watching us with a flushed, anxious face, and blue eyes that kept filling with tears.

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No doubt about which of the sisters suffered the most, *now!*

As for me, I tried not to look troubled, and to remember all that I could about Venice, and what I had seen on my journey, to tell Ida; and I sang her some of the old tunes that she had been so fond of, and read her a little in the Testament, and she was very happy, and we made it as much like old times as we could. After that I always went to Ida, at first two or three times a week, and afterwards every day, as long as she lived. She could not talk to me a great deal, but the few words that she said were full of comfort.

Every day I used to read the Bible to her. She asked me to read always that, and no other book, and sing her some little hymn. *I never knew any other person so perfectly peaceful and happy as she was then, and for the remaining time, nearly four months, that I had the privilege of being near her. She seemed to me almost in heaven already, living in the sensible presence of our Lord, and in the enjoyment of heavenly things, as I have never known any one else do, for so long a time.*¹ The almost supernatural hap-

¹ The Italics after these are Francesca's. I have marked the sentences here for after reference in 'Our Fathers.'—J. R.

piness which she enjoyed — (indeed, if I were to write just as I feel and believe, I should leave out the almost,) had nothing of the *convulsionary* about it: it was quiet and continuous — just the same when she was better, and when she was worse, through the nights that she could not sleep for coughing, and the days that found her always a little weaker: and it left her mind free to think of others, and to invent many ways of saving trouble to her mother and Giulia, and to find little odds and ends of work that she was still able to do.

Her poor mother still clung to hope, and was always trying to make out that Ida was better, or at least that she was going to be better as soon as the weather changed, or when she had taken some new medicine. When she talked in this way it used to make Ida a little sad; still she seldom said anything directly to discourage her mother, but only would say, "It will be as the Lord pleases: He knows what He does: perhaps He sees that if I lived I should do something wicked." One day, as we sat about her bed, where she soon began to spend most of her time, and her mother and Giulia were talking about her recovery, she said, "Perhaps it would be better that I should not recover: I can never be well, really: but still, let it

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be as the Lord will." "Have courage, Ida," said Giulia; and her mother, "Do not be afraid, my child." "I am not afraid," she answered. "I think," I said, "that God gives you courage always." "Yes, yes," she answered, with a very bright smile: "blessed are His words!"—and the poor mother went out of the room. Then Ida looked earnestly into my face and said, "There are tears in your eyes, but there are none in mine." I asked her if she wished to die. She thought a little while, and then said that she had no choice in the matter; if it were the Lord's will that she should die soon, she was very happy to go; or if He wished her to recover, she should be happy just the same; and if, instead, it pleased Him that she should live a long time as ill as she was then, still she wished nothing different. And she ended with a very contented smile, saying the words which she had said so often—"He knows what He does."

Another time, when I feared that she suffered with her constant and wearisome cough, she said, "It does not seem to me that I suffer at all; I am so happy that I hardly ever remember that I am ill." Her spirit never failed for a moment; there were none of those seasons of depression which

almost always come with a long illness. When others asked her how she was able to have so much patience, she always answered simply, "God gives it to me." A few words like these I can remember, but not many, and they were nearly all in answer to our questions. She never spoke much about her own feelings, physical or mental, and it was more in the wonderful lighting up of her face, when she listened to the Bible, than in what she said, that I saw how much she enjoyed.

All her taste for "pretty things" continued, and she liked to have everything about her as bright and cheerful as possible. She had a friend who used to send her, by my means, beautiful flowers almost every day, which were a great comfort to her, and it was always my work to arrange them on the little table by her bedside. When she was too tired and weak for her sewing, or her books of devotion, she used to lie and look at these flowers. Edwige (whom every one knows, who knows me, and of whom it is enough to say that she is a good and pious widow who lives in the country, and who was very fond of Ida) used to bring down continually such things as she liked from the country,—long streamers of ivy, and branches of winter roses and laurustinus,

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and black and orange-coloured berries from the hedges, —and these were a continual amusement to her. As long as she was strong enough, she used to like to arrange them herself with the same fanciful taste which she had always shown in my painting room, ornamenting with them her crucifix, which hung near the head of the bed, and her Madonna, and one or two other devotional pictures; and what were left she used to twine about the frame-work of her bed itself, so that sometimes she looked quite as if she were in an arbour. I think she obeyed literally the gospel precept, to be “like men waiting for their Lord.” The poor little room and its dying inmate presented always a strangely festive appearance, as if they were prepared for the soon expected arrival of one greatly loved and longed for.

The window was always opened at the foot of the bed,—*for light and air she would* have, and her dress and the linen of her bed were always as neat and clean as possible, to the credit of her mother be it spoken, who did the washing herself, with the help of her good little servant-maid Filomena. And the pretty flowers and green branches, and the fresh smell of the country which came from them, and in the midst of it all, Ida’s wonderfully happy face, made up as

bright and inspiriting a scene as I ever came near. I know that I used to think it better than going to church, to go into Ida's room.

There was a good American lady in Florence at that time, who did not know Ida; but she had lost a little daughter herself by the same complaint, and having heard of Ida's illness, she used to send her her dinner every day, choosing always the best of everything from her own table;¹ and this she continued to do as long as Ida lived. This good lady's children went constantly to see her, and always asked to be taken there, though they could not speak Italian. Children usually avoid a sick room, but she was so lovely and peaceful in appearance, that she seemed to impress them more as a beautiful picture than anything else, and they were always glad to go up all the stairs to look at her. I remember the first time that they ever went there, the youngest little girl sat contemplating her for a few minutes with a sort of wonder, and then asked me, aside, if she might kiss her.

I have said before that Giulia was engaged to be married. Her lover lived at Rome, and he was very anxious to marry her as soon as possible. She however was not willing

¹ Pretty—as if for her own dead daughter.— J. R.

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to leave her sister while she was so ill ; and at first I felt as she did, and did not wish her to go away from Ida. But there were some reasons why it seemed better that she should soon be married. Her lover, who was strongly and devotedly attached to her, was living quite alone and among strangers, (he was a Piedmontese,) and he seemed hardly able to support his long continued solitude. There was another reason, stronger yet. The doctor had forbidden Giulia to sleep in the same room with Ida, and she and little Luisa had been obliged to return into the dark closet where they had slept before. Giulia was looking poorly, and had a cough, and seemed very much as Ida had been a year ago ; and we all wished that she might change scene and climate before it was too late. Still we all shrank from laying on Ida, in her last days, this farther burden of separation from her dearly loved, only sister.

It was at once a relief and a surprise to me when, one day that they had left me alone with Ida, she began to speak to me of Giulia's marriage, and asked me to use all my influence with Giulia, and with her mother, to bring it about as soon as possible. She said that she had now only one wish left in the world, and that was, to see her sister happily married, and that it troubled her to

see the marriage put off from one day to another. Ida's word turned the scale, and in a few days the whole household was immersed in preparations for the wedding. I ought to say that the household was much reduced in number since I had first known the family. One of the little orphans had been adopted into a childless family, another had gone to live in the country with his maternal grandmother. The prettiest and sweetest of them all, little Silvio, had died, to the great sorrow of all the family, at the time when Ida was at Viareggio; so that now only Luisa was left at home. The girl's brother, Telemaco, had obtained some sort of government employment in a distant part of the country, so that he too was gone. And only the old people, and Luisa and Filomena, would be left to take care of Ida after Giulia should be married.

And now it seemed as if all poor Ida's hopes for this world, which had been so cruelly cut short, were renewed again in her enjoyment of Giulia's happiness. One of the prettiest pictures that I have in my mind of Ida, is as she sat upright in her bed, propped up with pillows, her face all beaming with affectionate interest, and *did her last dress-making work on Giulia's wedding gown*. She was very close to Heaven then, lying,

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as it were, at the gate of the Celestial City, and at times it seemed as if the light already began to shine on her face. Still, as long as she stayed in the world, she did what she could, and as well as she could, for those about her, and could put her heart into the smallest trifle for any one whom she loved.

She seemed always in haste for the wedding day, and often told me how much she wished for it; I think that she was afraid she might not live to see it. The day came at last,—a soft beautiful day of the late autumn, with plenty of flowers still in blossom to ornament the table, and the air still warm enough to make open windows pleasant. We had a very pretty simple wedding at S. Lorenzo, and then went back to the house, where we found Ida up and sitting in the easy chair, which she had not occupied for a long time. She was so excited and interested that a slight colour had come back into her face, and she looked as well as ever, and prettier than ever. Poor Giulia, laughing and crying and blushing all at once, hurried up to Ida, embraced her, and hid her face on her shoulder. Ida folded her closely in her arms for a minute or two without speaking, and I knew by the look in her face that she was giving thanks in silence, and praying for a blessing on this dear sister. When

the others went into the next room, where the wedding breakfast was already set out on the table, they invited me to go with them, but Ida said, "Let Signora Francesca stay with me for a few minutes, I want her to do something for me, and then she will come." I could not imagine what Ida wanted, she was so little in the habit of wanting anything; but I stayed, and as soon as she was satisfied that they had shut the door, she said to me, looking very pleased and triumphant, "Do you know, Signora Francesca, I am going to the table myself! I have always meant to go, when Giulia was married; and now you will help me to dress, will you not?" I was almost frightened, but I helped her arrange the lavender-coloured woollen dress which was her best, — *I knew now why she had spent so much time, during the first months of her illness, in altering and trimming it,*¹ — and tied her white silk handkerchief about her neck; and then she took my arm, and we went into the other room together.

There was a subdued exclamation of surprise from the few friends gathered about the table, and then all voices were hushed,

¹ Think, girl-reader, of the difference between that dress and a fashionable bridesmaid's bought one! — J. R.

as she came in slowly, looking rather like a vision from the other world, with her wonderful eyes and her white illuminated face and her beautiful smile, and sat down at the table opposite to her sister. But they were soon laughing and talking again, and complimenting Ida on her improved health, which enabled her to come to the table, and hoping that she would soon be well enough to come there every day; and Giulia's husband said that when she was a little better she must come to Rome and stay with them, where the air would be sure to do her good. I think she knew very well that she should never sit at the family table again, but she would not say anything to sadden their gaiety: so she thanked them all, and took a little morsel of cake, and sat looking very earnestly and affectionately at her sister; and pretty soon she grew tired, and all the loud voices jarred on her, so I led her back to the chamber. "This was the last wish I had," she said, after we were alone, and she had sunk back wearily into her easy chair, "to be with Giulia on her wedding day! and now, if you please, tell me all about the wedding in the church." I described it to her as minutely as I could, and she seemed much interested. Then she wanted me to read her a chapter in the Bible, as was my

habit, and after that I left her. At the head of the stairs I found myself waylaid by Giulia, who clung around my neck, weeping bitterly at parting with me, and entreated me over and over again to be good to Ida after she should be gone away.

The next day when I went there Giulia was gone, and Ida was quite weak and tired. She was never well enough to sit up again, and she faded away very slowly. The second day a letter came from Giulia, written almost in the first hour of her arrival in Rome, full of overflowing affection. Ida shed some tears at this, but not many; and she answered it with her own hand, weak as she was. One day, soon after this, as I was sitting beside Ida, she asked her mother to leave us alone for a few minutes, as she wished to speak to me. "Come a little nearer," she said, when we were alone; and I drew up close to her side. She took my hand, and looked at me solemnly and a little sadly. "I have something," she said, "that I have wanted to say to you for a long time: you are very fond of me, Signora Francesca?" I told her that I had always been so. "Yes," she said, "but you are much more fond of me since I have been ill, than you were before, and you grow more so every day; I see it in a great many ways." "That," I

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said, "is no more than natural; I could not help it if I would." "And lately," she continued, "*I have begun to be a little afraid that you may like me too much!*" "Dear Ida, what do you mean?" "It is a great comfort to me," she said, "to have you with me; but sometimes I am afraid that if I should die, you might grieve about it, and in that case I would rather that you should not come so often; I could not bear the idea of being a cause of sorrow to you. Now, I want you to promise that if I die, you will not be unhappy about me." "I promise you," I said, "that I will think of you always as one of the treasures laid up in Heaven, and I shall always thank God that He has let us be together for so long. I shall not be unhappy, but all the happier as long as I live, for the time that I have passed in this room." Her face brightened. "Then I am quite happy," she said; "that was what I wanted: now let my mother come back." And having once satisfied herself that I was prepared, she never spoke to me of dying again.

One day a good lady came to see her, who had known her before her illness, and she brought her a pretty little silver medallion of the Madonna, which gave her great pleasure, and she never let it go out of her sight

afterwards, as long as she lived. By this time Ida had become so ill that she was never able to lie down, but had to sit up day and night upright in her bed, supported by pillows, and her cough allowed her to sleep but very little. The lady was much troubled to see her in this state, and to comfort her, she told her that it was necessary to suffer much in this world if one would attain to happiness in the other. Ida answered, "That is my trouble! I *ought*, I suppose, to suffer a little, but I do not. *I lie here in the midst of pleasure.*" This lady had brought her a little book which she called the book of her remembrances, in which she had copied many prayers and pious reflections from various old authors; and because Ida seemed pleased with some portions which she read to her, she left the book with her, saying that when she had done with it, she might return it to her. Ida kept this book for several days, so that I once asked for it, feeling a little uneasy, as I knew the lady held it very precious. She said that she should like to keep it a little longer, and I did not hurry her. Two days afterwards she gave it back to me, asking me to give it to the lady, and to ask her pardon for having kept it so long. "I have added a little remembrance of my own," she said;

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"I have copied for her my favourite prayer: I could only write a few words at the time, and that is why I have kept the book for so many days." I looked at it; it was written in a clear round hand, with great pains. It was a prayer for the total conformity of one's will to the will of God. I know that the lady for whom it was written has kept it always as a great treasure.

"You are happy," Ida said to me once, "for you are strong, and can serve the Lord in many ways." "I hope," I said, "that we may both be His servants, but your service is a far more wearisome one than mine." To which she answered, with that bright courageous smile of hers, "What God sends is never wearisome,"—and I know that she felt what she said. At another time, in thanking me for some little service that I had done for her, she said that "I did her much good." "You do more for me," I answered. She looked a little puzzled for a minute; then, as she took in my meaning, she said, "It is not I who do you good; this peace which you see in me is not mine. I am nothing but a poor human body with a great sickness, which I feel just as any one else would; this peace is of God."

About the middle of December she received the communion. As she waited for the arri-

val of the sacrament she thought she saw a beautiful rainbow, which made an arch over her bed, and she saw it so plainly that she called her mother to look at it, but Signora Martina could see nothing. When she found that it was visible to no eyes but her own, she did not speak of it again to any one; only when I asked her about it she acknowledged that she had seen it, and that it remained for about a quarter of an hour: adding, "It is well,—it means peace."

She feared that it might be somewhat of a shock to her sister to hear that she had taken the communion, as it might give her the idea that she was worse; and she wrote her the news with her own hand, thinking that she could tell her more gently than any one else could do. I saw Giulia's answer to this letter. "My dearest sister," she wrote, "I always knew that you were more fit for Heaven than Earth, and I only wish I were as near it as you are!"

One day a little girl brought her an olive branch, as she said, to remind her of the one which the dove brought to Noah in the ark: probably the child did not know how *her* olive branch came, like the dove's, as a token of deliverance close at hand; but Ida understood the significance of the present, and had the olive branch placed over her

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Madonna, where it seemed to be a great comfort to her, and it stayed there until she died. Whenever the room was dusted she used to say, "Be careful and do not hurt my olive branch!"

She still loved hymns and religious poetry, and learned by heart many of the verses which I used to sing or recite to her. She liked best those which were most grand and triumphant. One day, as I was leaving the room, I heard her saying to herself in a whisper those beautiful lines of S. Francesco d'Assisi:—

"Amore, Amor Gesù, son giunto a porto
Amore, Amor Gesù, da mi conforto."

She was unselfish in her happiness as she had been in her sorrow. One day I found her worse, much distressed and agitated: she was sitting up in bed with her prayer-book, but there was none of the beautiful peacefulness in her face which always accompanied her prayers,—her eyes looked positively wild with grief and terror. With some difficulty (for she had little voice then), she explained to us her trouble, entreating earnestly Edwige and myself to help her with our prayers. One of her neighbours, a very wicked and profane old woman, who had been generally avoided by all the others, had met with a sudden

and fearful accident, and had been carried insensible to the hospital, where her death was hourly expected. Ida, as her mother afterwards told me, had not slept all night, but had continued in earnest and incessant prayer for this woman's forgiveness,¹ and so she continued during the few hours until she died, asking of all whom she saw the charity of a prayer. The poor woman died without speaking, and only in the next world shall we know whether Ida's prayers were heard. I have never felt as if they could have been altogether wasted.

Her charity took in the smallest things as well as the greatest.² Often, after leaving her, I used to go to see a young lady, a friend of hers and mine, who was an invalid just then, and she too liked flowers, so that sometimes when I went to Ida's room I would have two bunches of flowers in my hands, one for her and one for our friend; Ida would always wish to see them both;

¹ All this is dreadfully puzzling to me,—but I must not begin debating about it here, only I don't see why one wicked old woman should be prayed for more than another.—J. R.

² Yes, of course; but the worst of these darling little people is, that they usually can't take in the greatest as well as the smallest. Why didn't she pray for the King of Italy instead of the old woman? I don't understand.—J. R.

that she might be sure her friend's flowers were quite as pretty as her own, and if there were anything very beautiful in her bunch, she would take it out and put it in the other. And yet, if she cared for anything in this world, she cared for flowers: her love for them amounted to a passion.¹ Every day she would ask me particularly about all our acquaintance who were ill, or in any trouble; and sometimes it seemed as if she cared more for their small ailments, than for her own deadly illness.

Christmas Day came, her last Christmas in this world; and Ida and I arranged between us to have a little party in her room! Of course it was very little and quiet, because she was so weak then. There were only the old people, Luisa, and her little sister (the one who had been adopted into the family), Filomena and myself. But the room looked very pretty; Ida said it was the *festa del Gesù Bambino* and she had her little picture of the Gesù Bambino taken down from the wall and placed on the table beside her, all surrounded with flowers and green branches. I arranged all this under her superintendence, and then set the table for breakfast close to her bed, that the family

¹ Just the reason why she wouldn't take the best. I understand *that*. — J. R.

might eat with her once more. How pleased and happy she was while all this was going on! She was a child to the last in her enjoyment of little things. Then they came in; but before breakfast she would have me read S. Luke's story of the Nativity, and sing the old Christmas hymn —

“Mira, cuor mio durissimo,
Il bel Bambin Gesù,
Che in quel presepe asprissimo,
Or lo fai nascer tu!”

Then we all ate together; even Ida's tame ringdove, her constant companion during her illness, who was standing on the pillow close to her cheek, had his meal with the rest.

And after that came a great surprise; Ida put her hand under the sheet, and drew out, one by one, a little present for each of the family. But this was a little too much, being so unexpected; and when she gave her father his present, which consisted of some linen handkerchiefs, the poor old man, after vainly trying once or twice to speak, dropped his head with an uncontrollable burst of sobs, and was obliged, in a few minutes, to leave the room; and so ended Ida's last festa. The next day I found her hemming one of the handkerchiefs for her father; it was the last work that she ever

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did, and it took her several days to finish it, a few stitches at a time.

I am coming to the end of my story now. Soon after that, she began to be much worse, and we saw that we had her for only a few days. *On the last day of the old year* I was with her in the morning, and found her very weak, and, I feared, suffering much, though she made no complaint, and seemed to enjoy my reading as much as usual. I left her, promising to come again the next morning. About three o'clock the same day, as I sat at work, little Luisa came to my room, and said that Ida had fallen asleep, and they could not waken her. I immediately went home with the child, and Edwige also came with us, as she was in my room at the time. It was a dark, wet, gloomy day, but not cold; and we found Ida's room all open to the air, as usual. I had feared, from what the child said, to find Ida dead; but instead of that she was really in a deep and most peaceful sleep, sitting upright in the bed, with her face to the window. Everything about her was white; but her face was whiter than the linen—at least it appeared so, being so full of light; only her lips had still a rosy colour. Her dark hair fell over her shoulders, and one hand lay on the outside of the sheet; her hand did not look wasted any

more, but was beautiful, as when I used to paint it.

We all stood about her in tears, fearing every minute lest her quiet breathing should cease—for her mother had been vainly trying for some time to awaken her, and none of us knew what this long sleep meant—when all at once the sun, which had been all day obscured, just as it was setting, came out from behind a cloud; and shining through the open window at the foot of the bed, framed in a square of light the beautiful patient face, and the white dress, and the white pillow, while the weeping family about the bed remained in shadow. I never saw anything so solemn and overpowering; no one felt like speaking; we stood and looked on in silence, as this last ray of light of the year 1872, the year which had been so full of events to Ida, after resting on her for a few minutes, gradually faded away.

Soon afterwards she awoke, and seemed refreshed by her sleep, and said she had been dreaming she was in a beautiful green field. After this she slept much, which was a mercy; and would often drop asleep through weakness, even while we were speaking to her. In these last days she wanted me always to read her passages from S. Paul; and the epistles of S. Paul

have become so associated with her in my mind, that I can never read them without thinking of her, as I am constantly coming to some of her favourite verses. I see now, as I look at these verses, that they are, without exception, those that express our utter helplessness, and the perfect sufficiency of the Saviour; two truths—or rather one, for they cannot be separated—which had become profoundly impressed on her mind, and which she, as it were, lived on during her illness.

About a week before her death, as Edwige was sitting alone by her, she said, "This can last but a very few days now: pray for me, that I may have patience for the little time that remains." Then she spoke of L——, and said that she could not bear to hear people say, that he had caused her death by deserting her. "It was my own wish," she said, "to part from him; and it would have been better if we had parted before."¹ With her usual care for his good name, of which he was himself so careless, she said nothing of the reason for which she had wished to part from him, but let it pass as a caprice of her own. Then she asked Edwige, as a

¹ Take care, girl-reader, that you do not take this for pride. She is only thinking of shielding her lover from blame, so far as truth might.—J. R.

last favour, to help Filomena dress her for her grave, in case that her mother should not feel strong enough to do so. She seemed to shrink from the idea of being put into the hands of a stranger.

After this she often asked for the prayers of those about her, and always that she might have patience until the end. She never asked us to pray for the safety of her soul, for she was half in heaven already, and the time for doubting and fearing was over. I think it was on Friday that she spoke to her mother about her funeral, and tried to arrange everything so as to save trouble and expense to the family. That night she was in much pain, and not able to sleep, which greatly distressed her mother; but she said, "Why do you mind, mother? I shall have all eternity to rest in." On Saturday morning, as usual, she asked me to read her something of S. Paul. I read the fourth chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians. As I came to the verse, "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, 'I believed, and therefore have I spoken,' we also believe, and therefore speak," I looked up to see if she were able to attend, and I saw her face all lighted up, and she whispered, or rather her lips formed the word "beautiful." But as I

came to the end of the chapter, that unconquerable drowsiness came over her, and she fell asleep. I never read to her again.

On Sunday she was worse — slept almost all the time; and when she was awake, wandered a little in her mind, thinking that she saw birds flying about the room. On Monday, when I went to her, I found her asleep; and though I stayed some little time, she did not awake. I knew she would be disappointed not to see me; so, as I had some things to do, I went away, telling her mother that I would come back soon. On my return I was met on the stairs by one of the neighbours, who had been watching for me at her door. "She is worse!" she said; "I wanted to tell you, for fear that it should shock you too much to see her, without knowing it beforehand." I thanked her, and hurried up to Ida. The priest, who had been very kind all through her illness, was sitting by the bed, and a crucifix and prayer-book were lying on it by Ida's side. She had changed much in the one hour since I had left her sleeping so quietly. The peculiar unmistakable look of death was on her face, and she seemed much distressed for breath. I paused at the door, and the priest asked me to come in. Ida turned her eyes, from which the light was fast fading, toward

me, and the old smile came back to her face as bright and courageous as ever. "God gives you courage still, I see, Ida!" I said to her, as I came up to her side. She could not speak, but she nodded her head emphatically. Then she made a sign for me to sit down in my old place, near the foot of the bed, where her eyes could rest on my face; and there I sat through almost the whole of that sad yet beautiful day. Once she made a sign for me to come near her; I thought she had something to say to me, and I put my face close to hers, that I might understand her; but she did not speak, only kissed me twice over. That was her farewell to me.

All day long she alternated between sleep and periods of great distress for breath. Towards the end of the day, as she awoke out of a sort of stupor, her face became very beautiful, with a beauty not of this world. It was that *bellesza della morte*, which is seen sometimes in great saints, or in innocent little children, when they are passing away. I cannot describe it. I suppose it is what the old Jews saw in the face of S. Stephen, when it became "like the face of an angel." Certainly it was more like heaven than anything else we ever see in this world. She looked at me, then at her mother, with a

smile of wonderful joy and intelligence; then raised her eyes towards heaven with a look, as it were, of joyful recognition,—perhaps she saw something that we could not,—and her face was in a manner transfigured, as if a ray of celestial light had fallen on it. This lasted for a few minutes, and then she dropped asleep. When evening came on, they sent for me to come home. She seemed a little better just then, and when I asked if she were willing that I should leave her, she nodded and whispered, "*To-morrow morning.*" About seven o'clock that evening, without any warning, she suddenly threw her arms wide open, her head dropped on her bosom,—and she was gone.

The next morning, when I went to the house, she was laid down on the bed, for the first time for two or three months. The heap of pillows and cushions and blankets and shawls had all been taken away, and she lay looking very happy and peaceful, with a face like white wax. Even her lips were perfectly white at last; they were closed in a very pleasant smile. I went into the next room, where the family were all sitting together. The poor mother gave me a letter which Ida had written and consigned to Lena, (an intimate friend of hers,) a few days before her death, with directions to give

it to her mother as soon as she should be gone. In this letter she disposed of what little she had in money and ornaments.

She had never bought any ornament for herself, but several had been given to her, and she divided them, as she best could, among her relations and friends. Most of the letter, however, was taken up with trying to comfort her father and mother. She thanked them with the utmost tenderness for all that they had done for her, especially in her illness, and entreated them not to mourn very much for her; reminding them that, if she had lived a long life, she would probably have suffered much more than she had done. She left many affectionate and comforting messages to her brother, her sister, and various friends. She also left many directions for her burial,—among others, that a crucifix, which her dear old friend Edwige had given her on New Year's day, should be placed on her bosom, and buried with her. So the letter must have been written *after* New Year, at a time when she suffered greatly, and was too ill and weak almost to speak; and yet, not only did she enter into the smallest particulars (even to leaving her black dress to Filomena, and *advising her to alter the trimming on some other clothes, so as not to spend for the mourn-*

ing), but *she even took the pains to write the whole letter in a very large round hand, that her mother, whose sight was failing, might read it without difficulty.* A little money which she had in the savings bank, and which was to have been her dowry, she left to her beloved sister Giulia. To me she left a ring and some of her hair. I read this letter aloud amid the sobs of the family, which came the more as each one heard his or her own name recorded with so much affection. We went back into her room, and her mother opened the little drawer in the table at the head of the bed, where she had kept her few treasures, and took out the little ring which she had left me, and put it on my finger without speaking, as we stood by Ida's side. Then I went away to find some flowers—the last flowers that I was ever to bring to Ida! *The first lilies of the valley came that day,* and I was glad to have them for her, for they were her favourite flowers.

Late in the day I went back to sit, for the last time, a little by Ida's bedside. Edwige and Filomena had dressed her then for her grave, and very lovely she looked. She wore a simple loose dress of white muslin; her beautiful dark hair, parted in the middle, was spread over her shoulders and bosom,

and covered her completely to the waist. Edwige's crucifix and a small bunch of sweet flowers lay on her bosom. Her little waxen hands, beautiful still as in life, were not crossed stiffly, but retained all their flexible grace, as they lay one in the other, one of them holding a white camellia. A large garland, sent by the same friend who had for so long supplied her with flowers, was laid on the bed, enclosing her whole person as in a frame. Sometimes these garlands are made altogether of white flowers for a young girl; but Ida had been always so fond of bright colours, and of everything cheerful and pleasant, and her passing away had been so happy, that it seemed more natural in her garland to have roses and violets and jonquils, and all the variety of flowers. There was not one too gay for her! Six wax torches in large tall candlesticks, brought from the church, stood about her; the good priest sent those.

We all sat down beside her for a while, and I felt as if I should never be ready to leave her; but at last it grew late, and I had to come away. For a minute at the door I turned back, and wiped away the tears, that I might take one more look at the beautiful face smiling among the flowers; then I passed on, and my long, happy attendance in

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that chamber was over. That night, when she was carried away, the artist who had long wished to paint her portrait followed her to S. Caterina, where all the dead of Florence are laid for one night, and went in and drew her likeness by lamplight. All the servants employed about the establishment gathered about her, wondering at her beauty.

Ida is buried in the poor people's burying ground at Trespiano. Edwige went to see her grave a while ago, and found it all grown over with little wild "morning glories." There is a slab of white marble there, with the inscription, "Ida, aged nineteen, fell asleep in the peace of the Lord, 20th January, 1873"; and over the inscription is carved a dove with a branch of olive in its beak. I miss her much, but I remember my promise to her, and there has never been any bitterness in my grief for Ida. She does not seem far away; she was so near Heaven before, that we cannot feel that she has gone a very long journey.

THE END.



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